

## *Living for Christ in an Anxious World*

It's hard to believe, but 2010 is over and a new year is just beginning. This is the time of year when many people reflect on the past and make plans for the future. Along with the plans, people frequently wonder what the new year will bring. Sometimes thoughts of the future come with fears and anxieties; at other times, peace and contentment accompany thoughts of the future. How should Christians view the coming year?

In general, the world is anxious. Frequent television commercials advertise medications for anxiety and depression. People fear war, economic changes, illness, loss of homes or jobs, problems in education and various other events or circumstances. Should Christians be a part of this worry?

The Bible speaks about the presence of anxiety in our lives. Consider Matthew 6:25-34.

Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?

And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

The words "take no thought" in this context mean "do not be anxious." In this portion of the Sermon on the Mount, Christ gives instructions to His followers about life's anxieties. Notice the first part of this passage tells us not to worry about food and clothing. The examples of the animals and flowers show that God will provide for the necessities of life. The birds must work to get their food, but God provides what is needed to sustain life. The question then becomes, if God will provide the basics of life for the birds, why would he not provide the basics of life for the epitome of His creation (Genesis 1:26-27)? We should not worry over the blessings God has already provided for us.

Christ also points out in this passage that worry will not change the length of our lives. On the surface, the statement, "Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?" looks like it refers to worry about how tall an individual grows. The original text more likely indicated a length of life. The idea is the same: worry will not promote growth of the body's height nor a longer life on this earth. **We do not need to worry about things over which we have no control.**

Notice the next section of the text repeats the idea of a person worrying about food and clothing. Jesus then comments that the Gentiles, those who do not believe in God, focus their energies on these pursuits. **There may be legitimate concerns we have in this life, but we are not to make these items our primary focus.** Christ sums up his message in verse 33; **focus on making Christ first. The rest will be provided.**

As noted above, anxiety may come in our lives. How should we deal with it when it comes? The first step comes from Matthew 6:33. Put God first. If God is first in our lives, if we focus on doing those things that He commands and avoid those things that He forbids, there will be no time for worry. The second step is to spend time in thankful prayer. Paul wrote in Philippians 4:6-7, "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." The words "be careful" again express the idea of worry. Taking our concerns to God in prayer will ease our worries. Notice also that our prayers and requests to God should be accompanied by thanksgiving. We need to be thankful that God is willing to listen to our prayers and that He will grant us peace. James 5:16 reminds us that fervent prayer "availeth much."

Christians can be tempted to worry, just like the rest of the world. Unlike the world, Christians have no excuse. God has promised that if we put Him first in our lives, everything we need (not necessarily what we want) will be provided. Paul reminded the church at Corinth that troubles on this earth last for a short while and will not matter when we reach eternity (2 Corinthians 4:17-18). The command is clear: **Do not worry.** While it may not be easy in practice, we do have the tools we need to leave worry behind. Do not begin this new year filled with worry over what may happen. Put God first, pray fervently and always be thankful to God. With God, anything is possible (Matthew 19:26; Philippians 4:13).

*By Rebecca Rushmore*